

Deborah A. Thomas and Joseph Masco, Eds. *Sovereignty Unhinged: An Illustrated Primer for the Study of Present Intensities, Disavowals, and Temporal Derangements*, Duke University Press, 2023.

INTERLUDE 2

The Lung Is a Bird and a Fish

LOCHLANN JAIN

Writing:

POSITIONING THE SUBJECT, in which no air is placed on or beside a living morsel and hypotheses are tested regarding the relationship between them.

Born with entitlement, a human takes a breath. Just like each of the billions of mammals, ever, it immediately exacts another. To breathe is to never be satisfied: to demand air is human. There can be no redundancy and no substitution. Neither bread nor water, caviar nor cash, will do when air's presence is entreated. Denying air—could there be anything more simple and straightforward than air?—by some action or failure abjures another's animality and perhaps one's own humanity. Anticapitalist, breathing belies the whole idea of saving, let alone stockpiling.

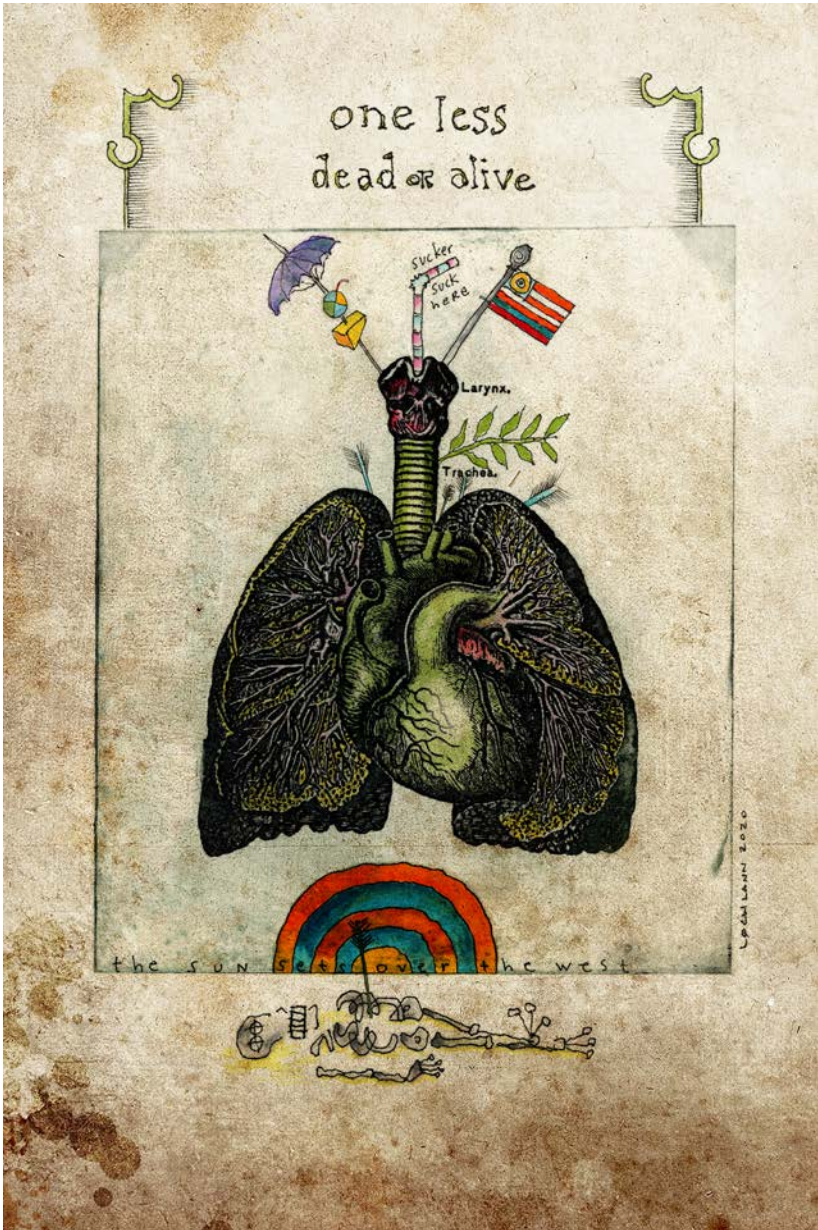
Over an average life span, a human will take and take and take, a dozen or so times for each of 36 million minutes, until they have sipped some 265 million liters of air. Polo players pilfer extra. Factory owners purloin even more. A seventy-year-old will have puffed, sniffed, and snorted a football field-sized balloon of the stuff. A spherical football field, each, for six billion average humans. Each gives back, of course, but it's different downwind.

The humble mouth and nose apparatus conceals an ambitious scheme, considering the sheer weight of the human meat sustained by oxygen—on a global scale perhaps some 600 billion pounds of flesh. And the trifling perforations serve higher ambitions. Enabling smell, taste, affection, communication, drug delivery, and alimentation, they provide access to appreciation and repulsion of nearly every sort for the owner and those nearby. Not only the entry (and exit) point of physical worlds, the human visage enables (and



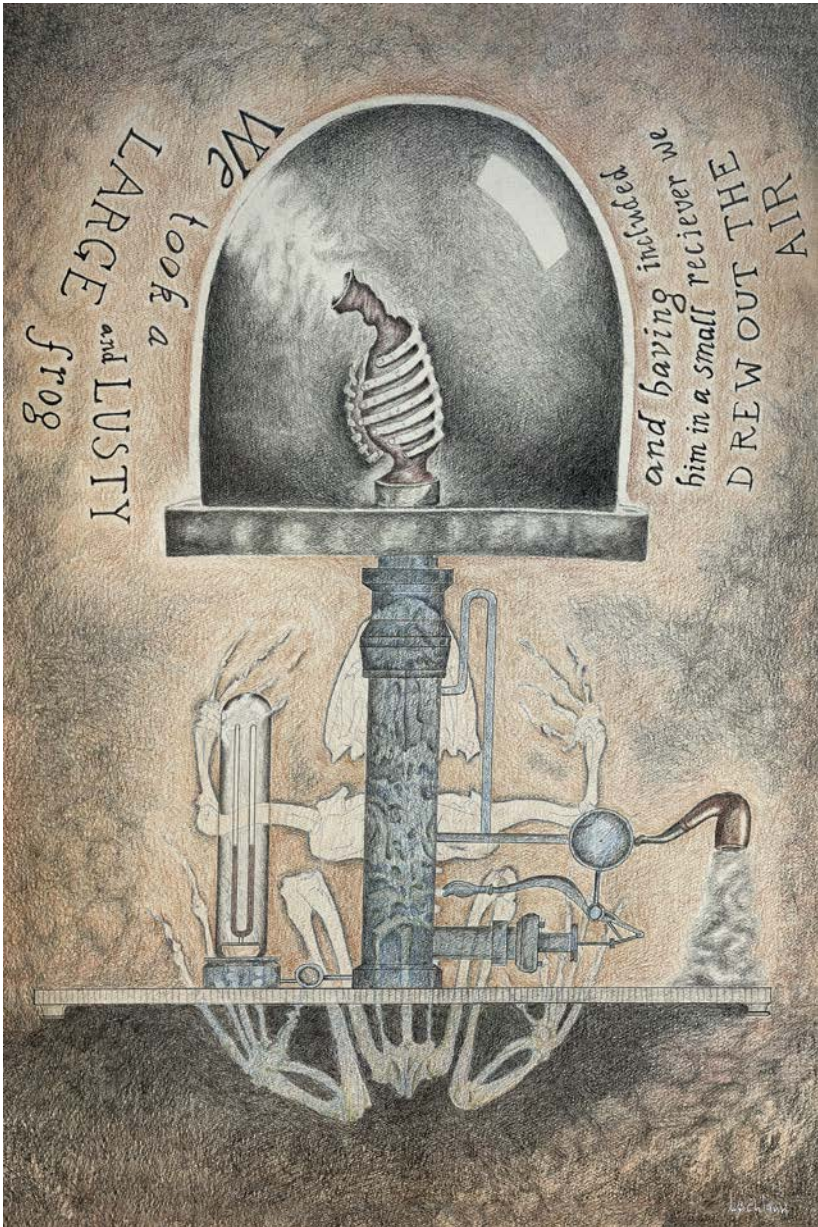
Inter2.1

Lochlann Jain, *Organ King Blue*, 2020. Ink on paper with digital manipulation, 24 × 36 inches.



Inter2.2

Lochlann Jain, *Sucker Punch*, 2020. Inked lithograph on paper, 24 × 36 inches.



Inter2.4

Lochlann Jain, *Boyle's Brief*, 2020. Pencil on paper, 24×36 inches.



Inter2.5

Lochlann Jain, *Sissy Boy with Geraniums*, 2020. Ink on paper, 20 × 18 inches.

of error. Most people never stomach a serious glitch—except, definitively, at the end. To be sure, a morass of statistics hints at the designed-in dangers: peanuts or lag screws caught in the airways; water, carbon monoxide, or phosphine inhaled neither by accident nor on purpose, but because there was nothing else there; homicide or suicide by chain or cushion; seizures involving errant tongues; asthma, emphysema, or allergies; pierogi speed-eating contests; marshmallow cheek-stuffing dares; viral cinnamon-swallowing YouTube challenges; capital punishment with ropes and gallows or trees; sex involving thongs, masks, and hoses. After that the list gets peculiar.

Bereavement aside, local conventions attend to the incongruities resulting from multipurpose human apertures. Slurpers of soup can be either gracious or uncouth depending on the soup's locale. Snoring library habitués and wheezy opera buffs beg for lenience, if only to save one's own sanity. Numerous dare-I-suffocate-my-loud-breather-husband quandaries litter the internet. The dinner table most highlights these unspoken customs, for here the competing wants of ventilation, communication, and ingestion most imperil each other. Indeed, a not insignificant number of people find their meal companion dead in the privacy of a locked restaurant toilet stall, having adjourned their humiliation if not the nonbreathing itself. The event even has a name, the "café coronary," since dinner companions may ignore or misrecognize the antics of a florid friend, not waving but choking, until they clatter to the floor—often, then, mistakenly identified as suffering a myocardial infarction and receiving disobliging (and nondislodging) CPR. The brain, in this case, in its last act of humanity, secretes an opioid to smother a choker's terror and disappointment as they recede from consciousness.

Like breathing, air is unobtrusive, effective, mysterious, and free. Air squats in random places. It hunkers; it drips; it seeps, absconds, and spurts. It communes and conveys, equally considerate of perfumes, pollutants, and pathogens. Free for the taking and easy to adulterate, it can evolve, still under the name *air*, still exchanged across time, flesh, space. And it took an age to figure it out. A history of the science and philosophy of breathing and its maintenance, namely the discovery of the air/lung relationship, required birds to take up residence in vacuum chambers with candles and plants, dog carcasses to be cut and piled up in the corners of Enlightenment laboratories, oxygen and nitrogen to be cashed out of the larger project of air, doctors and bystanders to devise and improvise devices to remove rooks and shillings from bronchial folds.

Made of negative space, imperative and imperiled like all negatives, air is either taken for granted or saturated in panic.

The Lung Is a Bird

One guesses that early on the casual observer had noted that people and animals who ceased to respire would cease to be. Even still, late seventeenth-century Europeans obsessed over proving it: frogs, rabbits, and birds croaked without air and did so consistently and quickly. These scientists had happened upon the perfect event. Engineering the expiration of an animal could at once illustrate cause and effect, offer an expedient demonstration, and flaunt charismatic metal and glass instruments, and thus, these men elegantly inaugurated a new system of knowing called experimental science.

Still, the details of the air-animal intersection posed a mechanical and intractable problem, beyond the not insignificant difficulties of creating and maintaining an airless space. Look at the duck: the chest rises, air scuttles the vacuum, the crest falls, air emerges from the windbag. And so on. Sure, clogging that process led to paroxysms and seizures. Time to death could be counted on pocket watches and recorded using new forms of annotation. Indeed, yes. But *how* did the nourishment take place? Was it the air itself? Something in the air? Or was it the movement of the chest? How to caress the lung with air, but disallow the movement? Ligatures and sparrow-sized glass bulbs were fashioned. Observations were made. Convulsions were had. Illustrations were commissioned. Reports were written and printed and circulated. Witnesses were enlisted.

When remedies for drowning victims were proposed (hanging upside down, bellows in the anus), some objected on the grounds that saving a life required stealing it from God. Experimentalists in the 1600s found form as God's Father Christmas—glass goblets featuring keeling and swaying little animals constituted a gift that kept on giving. Historians devoted to linear progress narratives consider these experiments with their persistent deflation of animal lungs as the precursors to the inflation of others (human) with game-changing iron lungs and ventilators.

During an experiment of 1662, a “large and lusty frog” took center stage in Robert Boyle's exhibition. A frog that had “freely breathed” in a small glass receiver all of a sudden “did not appear by any motion of his throat or thorax (chest) to exercise respiration” (Boyle 1670, 2015). What had changed? The mere “exsuction of the air” from the chamber—no one had so much as touched the poor thing. Air seemed to be subject to manipulation. In 1668, John Mayow found that an animal accompanied by a candle suffocated twice as fast as an(other) animal on its own, and con-

cluded (dare we say, again?) air is necessary for life. On the other hand, a pot of mint placed in the glass compartment could extend an(other) animal's life by minutes.

Robert Hooke, polymath and assistant to Robert Boyle, wondered if fresh air was not the issue at all. Life, he hypothesized, emanates from the movements of breathing. His contemporary, Richard Lower (1667), describes Hooke's experiment in "An account of making a dog draw his breath exactly like a wind-broken horse, as it was devised and experimented by Dr. Richard Lower, with some of his instructive observations thereon." Lower writes,

Hooke . . . carried out another experiment . . . on May 9, 1668. A brass tube was tied into the trachea of a dog and the animal was allowed to rebreathe into a large bladder attached to the tube. The report states "After about three or four minutes, the dog began to struggle violently, and to repeat his endeavors for breath very frequently. . . . Yet, after about six minutes, his strength failed a-pace . . . and then he began to be convulsed; and at the end of about eight minutes, we could see no signs of life."

Concluding that life required more than simply a breathing motion, Hooke designed a further experiment. This time he cut gills in the lower parts of the dog's lungs and blew a constant stream of air through the trachea such that air passed the lungs with no movement. The dog survived this experiment (though for how long?), thus enabling Hooke to reconfirm that air is necessary for life and recommit to "thoroughly discover the Genuine use of Respiration; and afterwards consider of what benefit this may be to Mankind" (1667, 540).

The executions were pondered and repeated, hare by hare, chaffinch by robin. Just as certain equations or fables offer perfect building blocks, say, for a child's education, the demonstration of air's necessity by suffocating small animals advanced an ideal way to develop the then novel mode of scientific investigation. People could see for themselves science at work, as they thrilled at attempts to solve the ultimate life death enigma. A body had motion, squeaks, chirps, joy, fear. A spirit, it could be said. Then it did not.

A century later, the painter Joseph Wright of Derby represented assorted forms of witnessing in his painting *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1768). Towering majestically over a viewer in London's National Gallery, it portrays divergent human reactions to—or, more accurately, around—a pretty bird in mid-suffocation, perhaps a cockatoo shipped from a colony. Two lovers make oogle eyes, called away from the momentous struggle



Inter2.6

Joseph Wright, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*, 1768. © The National Gallery, London.

before them. A boy cocks his head for a better look, while beside him a young man feels the seconds of a pocket watch ticking against his palm as he pensively looks on. An older man studies a brightly lit vase suspending some sort of specimen in liquid. Some critics identify this gray mass as a lung in reference to Wright's own asthma and labored attempts at breath. The lung as vanitas. The painter as bird.

Chiaroscuro illuminates most clearly two girls—one wide-eyed with concern for the bird, the other turned away entirely as a father-figure comforts and explains. The girls could not, could never have, attested to the science of the thing, its accuracy or reproducibility: penises, real or assumed, were required for such affirmations. (What if the girl had cocked her head, intently watching the experiment across the table from a teary-faced boy?) That aside, as a reflection of, or foil for, (childish?) compassion, these dismayed expressions substantiate, in a still image, the effect of passing time: a bird is in the timeless and yet urgent process of asphyxiation. It's a fancy bird, a lovely one, not dissimilar to the girls of subsequent films, themselves smothered and snuffed for something like pleasure or at least gratification.

Birds, like humans, are not breathers. Birds, like humans, are breathed within a pneumatic microcosm. The lung and its environs choreograph changes in volume and pressure in a system that creates something like a feeling of need. The need doesn't present in choice; rather, surfactants, vacuums, and chemical reactions systematically produce respiration—until, of course, they don't. They don't if they are blocked for whatever reason, and then, a feeling may encroach, an experience of a sovereign physiology—the panic, the frustration, or pleasure at having to rely on something so utterly banal as air and the absurd, generic process of respiration. People pent up in closed spaces know versions of this, the pure biological phenomenon with its specific chemical and physiological properties, suddenly situated, pitted against the spatial necessities of their conditions of work or capture or play: coal mines, ship holds, diving bells, chimneys, BDSM bondage, and the like making breathing, choking, suffocating, and drowning into a historical, infinite, event-by-event-by-event repetition.

Thus, the canary. A breather system, vibrant or besieged, so dear to European hearts and mines.

The bird is a lung.

The Lung Is a Fish

Consider the choker. Physiologically, the throat will grip a perfectly char-grilled bolus of ribeye in a drowning response meant to protect the lung and its job to enervate the brain. In a rather weighty conceptual flaw, the non-breather's own body hermetically seals the trachea around the steak (or tofu).

An extremely odd, fragmented, but nevertheless distinguishable history attends the enigma of pending respiration with titles such as *A Dissertation on Suspended Respiration from Drowning, Hanging, and Suffocation: In which is recommended a different Mode of Treatment to any hitherto pointed Out* (Coleman 1791) and which describes numerous nonconsensual experiments involving drowned, hanged, and otherwise asphyxiated cats, dogs, rabbits, and small beings; this time the goal was life-saving. Once rendered unable to respire—in other words, incapable of receiving heat from the air into their blood—the animals underwent dissection and, in the case of this dissertation, were served as the pudding's proof for bloodletting as a treatment for the aforementioned modes of suffocation.

Dr. Samuel Gross, rendered immortal by Thomas Eakins and Alexander Calder (father of the twentieth-century mobile sculptor), if not by his medical

endeavors, wrote a monograph collating both fascinating and mundane cases of choking. *A Practical Treatise of Foreign Bodies in the Air-Passages* (Gross 1854) recounts numerous reports of objects that had been lodged in throats; their exact locations and styles of entrapment; the often fulsome, if not downright melodramatic, clutching and reeling macro- and microreactions to these happenings; and an array of tools for creative extraction. He asks, rhetorically:

How many persons have perished, perhaps in an instant and in the midst of a hearty laugh, the recital of an amusing anecdote, or the utterance of a funny joke, from the interception at the glottis of a piece of meat, a crumb of bread, a morsel of cheese, or a bit of potato without suspicion, on the part of those around, of the real nature of the case! Many a coroner's inquest has been held upon the bodies of the victims of such accidents, and a verdict rendered that they died by the visitation of God, when the actual cause of death lay quietly and unobserved at the door of the windpipe of the deceased. (Clerf 1975, 1450)

In specifying a hitherto obscured medical enigma, the doctor also grasps the full uncanny concurrence: the animated raconteur precipitously rendered mute and red-faced by a newly fixed and foreign—of all banal things—French fry, the very thing meant to sustain and entertain, intended as a means of companionship and merriment, now turned assassin, destroying, quickly, but too slowly for the comfort of the gawking, paralyzed bystander, who instantly, in his dumb immobility, turns abetter. All rendered inscrutable to medical science and history by an oblivious coroner. How to even comprehend such a preternatural marvel: fifteen hundred miles of air conduits packed into a couple of square feet with an area the size of a tennis court, and spelled with an alchemical sensitivity to transfigure mere air—everyday empty space—into life itself. How to imagine that the magic of this most beguiling of organs could be stymied by such ridiculousness as a chunk of chocolate-covered bacon?

Snubbing the explanation of God's visitation, Gross gives mechanics a turn; he explores in great detail the geometry of throats and entrenched objects before considering known treatments: emetics, sneeze producers, iodine, leeches, castor oil, rhubarb, hog bean, upside-down hanging.

While the human form has remained somewhat constant, the foreign objects found in the airpipe are the very epitome of cultural specificity.

A piece flown from a toy whip lodges itself in a child, a glass collar button relaxes into a bronchial fold and takes an interminable six months to smother its host, a brass atomizer tip holes up in a windpipe. Unremarkable crucifixes, cockleburs, fence staples, shoe buttons, shawl pins, diaper pins, and real and false molars all, somehow, dwelled in the long-gone air passages of long ago.

If Gross's efforts favored the chronicle, Chevalier Jackson was the true hero of those whose windpipes harbored damming foreign objects. A truly obsessed geographer of all things tracheal and thoracic, he found an "in-describable pleasure" in his work. He perfected his scope-and-prod design by retrieving objects a medical assistant inserted into a dog's throat (Capello 2012, 96). He kept, categorized, labeled, matted, titled, and framed the hundreds of objects he had collected from various locations in his patients in lieu of payment (the human subject had no choice in the matter). An entire drawer of jacks. Each accompanies notes on the procedure, including type of forceps (alligator, straight, rotation, side curve, etc.), "location in patient," complications, age, outcome. These fetishes now rest at the Mütter Museum of medical curiosities in Philadelphia.

Such adventures became the subject of his autobiography, one littered with admonitions against placing objects in the mouth to begin with. The book devotes a full two pages to women's brilliance and superior abilities; though he never married, he took pride in treating his assistants well. His inimitable fascinations struck a chord with readers, who made the work a best-seller in 1938.

Chevalier was unquestionably the most revered remover of foreign bodies. Eugene Willis Gudger (1866–1956), an obscure bibliographer of fish literature, was Hooke, line, and sinker the weirdest. Gudger, perhaps only marginally (self-)interested in respiration, was "always on the lookout for unusual phenomena wherein fishes are concerned" (1933, 573). Among his four hundred-odd articles, one finds a collation of cases gathered from around the world not only in 1926 and 1927, but also in 1933. Unusual indeed were the cases he collected for "Live Fishes Impacted in the Food and Air Passages of Men," "Live Fishes Impacted in the Pharynx of Man: An Addendum," and "More Live Fishes Impacted in the Throats of Men" (Gudger 1926, 1927, 1933).

Tallying case studies in which fish "jump down a man's throat" from medical journals and fishing magazines, he includes a random assortment of facts about the (usually) deceased person, the (usually) deceased fish, the (usually haphazard) attempts to save the person, the location,



Inter2.7

Chevalier Jackson with his collection of foreign objects. Courtesy of the Chevalier Jackson Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

and the unique circumstances surrounding each “curious and interesting fatality.” Accounts of the fish, the throats, and the audacious efforts to reinstate breath are of a factual, bibliographic nature only, bereft of even a perfunctory expression of sympathy, much like his own obituary: “At his request, the word ‘ichthyologist’ was carved on his tombstone” (Quinlan 1986).

A Nigerian woman placed a fish in her mouth while attending to the nets with both hands. When she collapsed, her “friends at once opened her mouth and endeavored to remove the obstruction; they failed and after five minutes all her convulsive movements ceased” (Gudger 1933, 534). The doctor “found a small fish, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, wedged firmly down the trachea, with the snout lying transversely between the vocal cords. Minute spines on the dorsal surface and at the border of the gills effectually prevented its extraction upwards, and, indeed, the tail had already been pulled off by the

victim's friends." In this instance, the deceased had been taken to a mortuary not to gather these incidentals, but to determine whether she was a witch. In the West, too, breath and the occult corresponded. In the ancient catch-22 of ordeal by water, a sinking body indicated a suspect's innocence; capital punishment awaited those who survived.

In other cases, death came more slowly. A toddler playing with a *pla lin ma* in Siam persisted for a full eleven hours after it "slipped into her throat" (Gudger 1933, 575). A child named Fiem underwent what must have been a somewhat brutal treatment after several hours of intimacy with an *Anabas testudineus*. With the air-blocking creature finally unwedged, the boy died in ten more minutes. The fish, one learns, survived.

In addition to fish chokers, knucklebone chokers, and hot dog chokers, one could compose other inventories. Wikipedia's list of famous chokers enumerates mostly men. Attila the Hun, Tennessee Williams, James Madison—plugged from the inside. Women, at least in the public record, seem to have been spurned in their breathing efforts from the outside. Most famously, Isadora Duncan was choked by her scarf trapped in the spokes of a car. (And then a litany of both notable and quotidian girlfriends suffocated by their men for anger or delight.) From the point of view of the subject, the details—the specific object caught in the throat, its precise location, which forceps might best attempt extraction—are superfluous. What matters is exactly what is not happening in the particular moment and when that not-happening might stop. At this moment, the sovereign brain's requirement for a chemical and the sovereign mind's requirement for comfort split in absolute terms, leaving the self to flounder amidst in a jag of violent, ineffectual, mortifying (albeit posted on YouTube) gagging.

If breathing has a history, it has no memory. Nonbreathing tracks a memory with no history. Everyone remembers or fears or could at least imagine the lodging of a fish in their own airpipe, its spines painfully pressed askew against the larynx; a button, its flat velvety plastic trapped just beyond the reach of a friend's long fingernails; or a masticated cracker-Camembert-Cabernet mass ineluctably sliding down the (very) wrong pipe.

If one hasn't experienced or witnessed an asphyxiation firsthand or has neglected to read Chevalier Jackson's blockbuster memoir, a few idiosyncratic obsessives have chronicled the events for a reader's entertainment and contemplation. But aside from this register of case studies that aim

more toward locating general rules of checked respiration, coining ideas for prevention and treatment, or exhibiting morose entertainment, the story of instantaneous nonbreathing, generated through an aggregate of individuals, does not particularly inspire the sort of grand narrative required to make history. No, nonbreathing recedes, event by event, from obituary to memory, to a trace, to nothing itself.

The fish is a lung.

The Bird Is a Fish

Meanwhile, America, an economic and political project not tied to deep historical foodway customs, allied itself with the project of embedding new forms of harm in the breathways: fallout from hundreds of atmospheric nuclear bomb tests, torrents of leaded gas and other pollutants, clouds of tobacco smoke all propelled new kinds of breathing and nonbreathing subjects. How can you convince a population to accept, even celebrate as a national right and victory, the terms of their own suffocation? It's all about swagger, and since everyone knows it's uncouth to swagger with a paunch, the middle offers as good a place as any to start.

In 1953, as iron lungs were breathing some Americans while cigarettes asphyxiated others, that most infamous of un-Americans, Ethel Rosenberg, was killed in the electric chair for passing nuclear secrets to the USSR.

But 1954's activities aligned America, with a strange specificity, to the project of curtailed respiration. In 1954, the signing of the Interstate Highway Act, sold to citizens at the 1939 World's Fair by General Motors as a vision of liberation, had the result of injecting lead debris into virtually every American lung. In the all-out effort to market the sale (and only incidentally, dispersal) of leaded gas, atmospheric lead tripled between the 1927 advertisement "Ride with Ethyl in a high compression motor and get the thrill of a lifetime!!" (Dupont 1927) and 1954, when it was all but forgotten that Ethyl once signified a home-makeable harmless alcohol that could once power an automobile. Now it signified a plump thirty-seven-year-old traitor and a profitable leaded gas.

In 1954, with 45 percent of Americans smoking, the first major study linked "toasted" and "tasty" cigarettes to lung cancer, and the tobacco industry began the mass production of scientific controversy. And also, they launched the flip-top box, which jabbed through the breast pocket



Inter2.8

Norman Bel Geddes, Futurama Exhibit,
New York World's Fair, 1939. © The Estate of
Margaret Bourke-White/Norman Bel Geddes
Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Re-
search Center, University of Texas at Austin.

but required the removal and display of the box and brand for all to see each time you wanted a fag. For the next half century, more Americans than not would witness themselves, their friends, or their relatives suffocate to death.

In 1954, the USSR exploded its first thermonuclear bomb, and the United States bungled the Castle Bravo nuclear test. Underestimating the force of its blast by two-thirds, the military contaminated seven thousand square miles of the South Pacific. A tuna boat, the *Lucky Dragon #5*, that had been outside the designated danger zone nevertheless shoveled piles

TAKE A TIP FROM US

THIS YEAR you need a *real* vacation. You need to breathe fresh air, see new places, and wash away your worries with comfortable, refreshing travel.

Even an old car can give you that kind of vacation if you do just one thing—give it Ethyl!

With Ethyl Gasoline you banish harmful knock, overheating and sluggish performance. You put *new life* into your car; bring back the youthful power that makes it *fun* to drive!

Whether you make week-end trips or cross the continent—

remember: *the next best thing to a brand new car is your present car with Ethyl.*

Even if you don't put dollars and cents value on the extra enjoyment and satisfaction, Ethyl will make savings in lessened repair bills that more than offset its small additional cost. Ethyl Gasoline Corporation, Chrysler Building, New York City.

GOING TO THE WORLD'S FAIR?

Be sure to visit the Ethyl Exhibit at the Century of Progress in Chicago. You'll find it in General Motors Building and will see with your own eyes why Ethyl makes *any* car run better and actually costs **LESS** by the year.

ETHYL

THE WORLD'S HIGHEST QUALITY MOTOR FUEL

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{A} \\ \text{GOOD} \\ \text{GASOLINE} \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} \text{A} \\ \text{PLUS} \\ \text{ETHYL} \\ \text{OIL} \end{array} = \begin{array}{c} \text{A} \\ \text{BETTER} \\ \text{ETHYL} \\ \text{GASOLINE} \end{array}$$

Ethyl fuel contains lead. © E. G. C. 1933

NEXT TIME STOP AT THE ETHYL PUMP

Inter2.9

Advertisement in *National Geographic* magazine, June 1933.

of radioactive ash off the decks and took two weeks to return Japan. The return of the sick twenty-three-member crew rendered public what the United States had hitherto kept an airtight secret: that radiation sickness was real, and that its time-space footprint far exceeded that of the bomb blast. Still, the United States refused to disclose the composition of the fallout, citing issues of national security. Nevertheless, aboveground bomb tests continued in the American West for another ten years, spreading nuclear contamination across the country.



Inter2.10

Castle Bravo nuclear test. Courtesy of the National Archive and Records Administration.

Ethel the pawn, many would agree, was captured and killed by a stereotype of American womanhood. Accused of typing, of all things, for her husband and brother as they conspired to give the Russians nuclear secrets. At the kitchen table, of all places, the hearth of the American family where togetherness and love were performed through SPAM! Alpha-Bits! Minute Rice! Tang!! A concocted story had her witnessing the tearing of a red white and blue Jell-O: imitation raspberry! box that, in true spy form, could be matched by two strangers carrying one apiece. This scenario became a last-ditch effort for the government to extract her husband's confession (for Julius, ultimately, communism trumped conjugal interests; he admitted nothing).

Ethel's story parallels the artifact of her downfall: "America's favorite dessert," "you can't be a kid without it," itself a story of America's infinite, breathless simulacra and better living through chemistry. A national self-definition relied on the ability—the right—to choose which color of animal hoof extract mixed with sugar and chemical flavoring would usher your



Inter2.11 Marlboro cigarette pack. Photo by Lochlann Jain.

offspring into American childhood. Meanwhile it would take the government another five decades to counsel those Americans that had grown up in the 1950s and 1960s and drunk milk that they were at risk from fall-out produced cancers. No wonder it took five shocks of two thousand volts for this spy to perish. That is what sovereignty feels like.

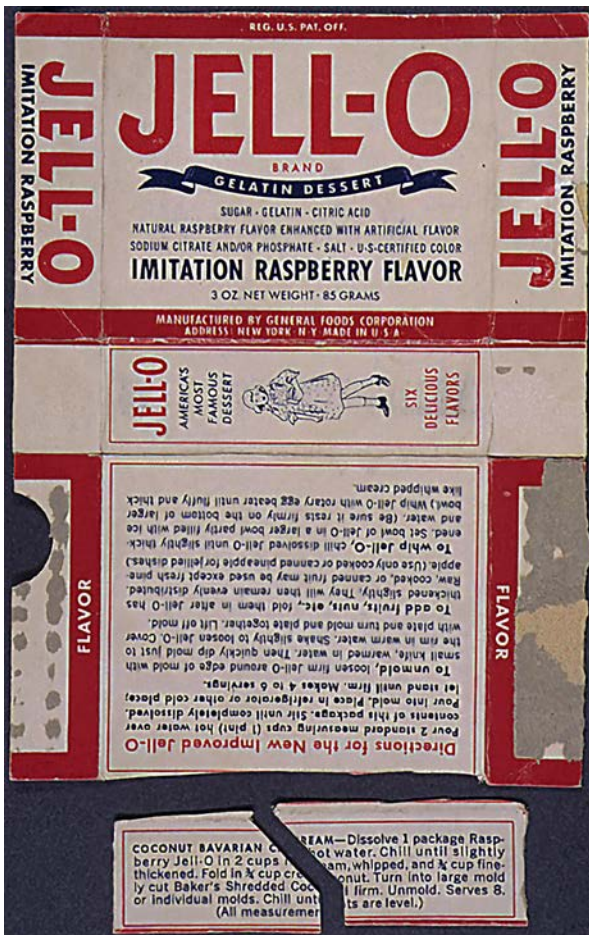
Chevalier Jackson, ever advising on dangerous playthings, lived just long enough to witness plastic-wrapped children executing new forms of suffocation. Plastic bags, introduced in 1959, soon displayed *Warning: this is not a toy*. Plastic aims to arrest respiration, protecting their contents from air's ability to corrode food and food-resembling products. The resulting spate of limp and lifeless children indicated less an accidental side effect of packag-



Inter2.12 Ethel Rosenberg being taken to trial, 1951. Bettmann via Getty Images.

Inter2.13 Campbell Soup can. Photo by Lochlann Jain.





Inter2.14

Jell-O box exhibit used in the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and Morton Sobell. Courtesy of the National Archive and Records Administration.

ing than the real deal, a concentrated portent of the soon-to-be-ubiquitous junk. Even DuPont (who, with GM and Standard Oil, also gifted us leaded gas) advertised its product with children encased in the stuff: babies and toddlers as glistening offerings. “Everything’s at its best in Cellophane.” Perhaps truer if cellophane were soundproof.

A wrapper, as a hermetic seal, acts to preserve by stilling air’s corrosive effects. As a hermeneutic seal, a package blusters and masquerades. Andy Warhol

Mom says
I'm so fresh
and so clean
(sometimes)—
she ought to
wrap me in
Cellophane
to keep me
that way.



Everything's at its best in Cellophane

- Cellophane keeps things clean
- Cellophane keeps things fresh
- Cellophane lets you see what you buy

DU PONT
Cellophane

BETTER THINGS FOR BETTER LIVING
... THROUGH CHEMISTRY
Mark "The First Cellophane" in Tennesse

Inter2.15

“Everything’s at Its Best in Cellophane,” 1956, series I, box 43, folder 33, E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company Advertising Department records (accession 1803), Manuscripts and Archives Department, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware.

apotheosized the effect, repeating tomato soup cans (not just any brand would do), murderous tuna fish cans (any middle-class housewife would do), and colorful Marilyns (not just any Marilyn) as well as mass-produced deaths: car crashes and electric chairs. Brought into the same orbit, these object sets absorbed other Americana as one and the same: the suburb needed the station wagon needed the gas but also the mother who needed the grocery store to quiet with sugar those children she’d been told (and believed) would make her whole and they occasionally did but mostly she wanted to suffocate them herself, and the tabloids could vulgarize the crashes and the electric chairs



Coming events cast their shadows before.

The feeling of utter listlessness, lack of energy, desire to be alone, or the “don't care” feeling, are all shadows of coming events. No woman should permit those symptoms to gain ground, for, being forewarned, she should be forearmed. *Lydia E.*

Pinkham's Vegetable Compound will disperse all those shadows. It goes to the very root of all female complaints, renews the waning vitality, and invigorates the entire system. Surely such letters as this will support our claims :

“Reach for a vegetable instead of a sweet”

Inter2.16

Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, 1920. From the Stanford Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising collection (<https://tobacco.stanford.edu/>).

could punish the un-Americans and now the art collectors could join in the diversion and increase their share of the pie. Jasper Johns could be American Flags and bull's-eyes, and bull's-eyes could be Lucky Strikes and slimming, and Benjamin Kubelsky could be the Jell-O Program with Jack Benny and jiggles while Virginia Slims became tennis so that tennis could be women although not the Equal Rights Amendment but malignant all the same.

Advertising for one of the best-known patent medicines of the nineteenth century, Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound hinted at women's propensity toward plumpness in middle age as a barely veiled threat—“coming events cast their shadow before”—and of course a promise: “Reach for a vegetable instead of a sweet.” If this 1890s campaign rings familiar, it's because the entire thing, foreshadowing, tagline, and quote, was ripped off and used to sell Lucky Strike cigarettes. The threat of litigation from the candy industry amputated the slogan, but by then every American could join the dots: “Reach for a Lucky instead of a . . .” If Joseph Wright of Derby displayed a lung as vanitas, producers and consumers corroborated to turn America's cancer sticks into pure vanity.



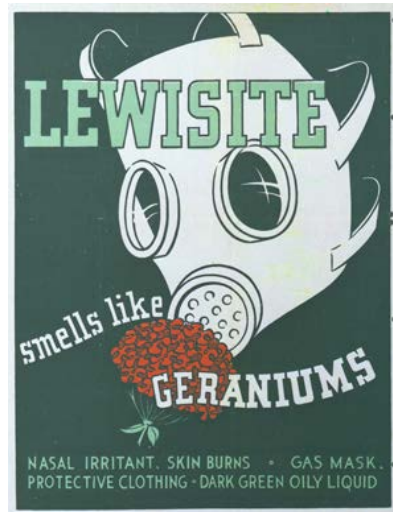
Inter2.17 Lucky Strikes ad, 1929. From the Stanford Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising collection (<https://tobacco.stanford.edu/>).

Contents eaten or inhaled, containers stick around. If someone squinting might confuse the palm-size red-and-white Marlboro cigarette box with a Campbell's soup can, the projects of breathing and eating could also be substituted, each industry vying for the same working- and middle-class American dollars.

For the purposes of “A Lung Is a Bird and a Fish,” ideally Thomas Midgley Jr.’s expiration date would have been 1954, rather than ten years earlier. Midgley introduced two inventions that changed the world and



Inter2.18 Geraniums Lewisite Gas ad.
Courtesy of the Detroit Historical Society.



Inter2.19 Gas Mask Lewisite Gas ad.
Courtesy of the Otis Historical Archives, National Museum of Health and Medicine.

everyone in it. Alongside General Motors, he promoted his leaded gas, christened Ethyl, over the unprofitable use of ethanol, even as he himself, as well as others working to prototype the additive, suffered from severe lead poisoning. Freon, too, responsible for ozone depletion, was his, phased out only in 2020. He escaped both of these means of slow death, his soul departing his body with the help of one of his other inventions. A pulley system, designed to help him out of bed after a disabling bout of polio, strangled him, leading him to thoroughly appreciate the Genuine use of Respiration.



Inter2.20

Schanbel von Rom. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Note

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